

## **2. When Security Trumps Identity: Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Islam Karimov**

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It is difficult to underestimate the strategic importance of Uzbekistan. Located in the heart of Central Asia, bordering all other post-Soviet states of the region and Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous state (31 million), the largest market, and fields the largest army (with some 50,000 troops). Despite a large Uzbek ethnic majority (over 85 percent) it is also home to various ethnic minority groups. Almost three million ethnic Uzbeks are clustered in the border regions of the other post-Soviet Central Asian republics, and another three million live in Afghanistan, making Uzbeks the largest ethnic community in the region. Despite the many challenges the country faced in 1991, including a total lack of experience in conducting foreign affairs, Uzbekistan has been an important strategic player in the region throughout the entire post-Soviet period. Moreover, President Islam Karimov's Uzbekistan was a predictable international actor. Its international partners knew what to expect from him.

The death of Karimov in September 2016, after twenty-seven years in office, raises questions about the domestic political order and the evolution of state–society relations. It also opens space to uncertainties about the country's foreign policy and the continuity of the path undertaken under the country's first president. This chapter uses Uzbekistan's reaction to the 2010 violence in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, to explore Tashkent's foreign policy under Karimov. The case study demonstrates that Uzbekistan did play a role in maintaining Central Asian security and stability by refraining to support Uzbek co-ethnics abroad and more generally refraining from linking ethnic nationalism and foreign policy. Security trumped identity under Karimov's rule. As the country moves into the post-Karimov era, the key questions are: (1) whether or not the new president will resort to ethnic nationalism in foreign policy as a way to boost legitimacy at home and (2) will Tashkent renounce its long-held policy of non-alignment, especially in relation to ties with Russia. Will the Uzbek people

continue to “not be dependent on anyone,” as President Karimov himself maintained in the aftermath of the Andijan events in 2005, when a government crackdown on protesters led to hundreds deaths and thousands of people seeking refuge beyond the border.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I draw on President Karimov’s own writings and speeches as well as other official policy documents to highlight the Uzbekistani leadership’s worldview and the key tenets of the country’s foreign policy to date. Preserving the country’s sovereignty and independence, non-alignment, and regime security and survival defined Uzbekistan’s foreign policy under Karimov. Consequently, ethnicity hardly played any role in Uzbekistan’s relations with its neighbors. The second part of the chapter is an empirical illustration of those foreign policy pillars. In analyzing popular reactions to Uzbekistan’s handling of the 2010 Osh violence, I review a number of Uzbek-language discussion forums and blogs to demonstrate that Tashkent’s long-held position came under criticism at the time. This is important to the broader argument I make; namely, that in the post-Karimov era, as the new leader(s) seek to boost their legitimacy domestically, resorting to ethnic nationalism might be a relatively easy card to play. That is to say, should the tragic events of 2010 repeat themselves, Uzbekistan’s traditional policy of non-intervention is likely to come under stress.

### <A>Stability at All Costs: Sovereignty, Security, and Non-alignment in Uzbekistan’s Foreign Policy

Uzbekistan has been a predictable, if difficult actor in early twenty-first century global and regional politics. Three main debates concerning Uzbekistan’s foreign policy have emerged in the scholarly and policy literature.

#### <B> Domestic Drivers

The first debate concerns the key drivers of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy. Although some observers have noted the importance of the regional strategic environment, itself in flux, and

more systemic-level factors,<sup>2</sup> most acknowledge the overwhelming importance of domestic factors,<sup>3</sup> such as regime security and survival,<sup>4</sup> centralization of decision-making,<sup>5</sup> the role of the security services,<sup>6</sup> and prestige.<sup>7</sup> What is perhaps disputed is whether this was the result of a clear articulation of the country's national and security interests or instead the product of "strategic confusion."<sup>8</sup> In sum, stability (the preservation of peace and order within the country's territorial borders) has become the mantra of Uzbekistan's geopolitics. Beyond the fences of "Fortress Uzbekistan" lies the realm of instability and disorder that Karimov prevented from spilling over into Uzbekistani territory. In Uzbekistan, preservation of stability has implied protection from spill-over of instability and violence from neighboring countries, which might have come in the form of civil wars (in Tajikistan, from 1992–1997), regime change (in Kyrgyzstan, in 2005 and 2010) or ethnic strife (Kyrgyzstan 2010). Islam Karimov's book *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century: Threats to Security, Conditions of Stability and Guarantees for Progress* probably best exemplifies the Uzbekistani regime's preoccupation with fear of instability:

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[w]hat kind of period will the 21<sup>st</sup> century be for the inhabitants of Uzbekistan? [...] Are we aware of difficulties on the road to reform [...]? [A]re we aware of the threats to our stability and security?<sup>9</sup>

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### <B>Sudden Shifts

The second debate, which attracted considerable attention given the significant geopolitical implication of such moves, revolved around the country's sudden and abrupt turnarounds in its international alignments.<sup>10</sup> Strategic partnerships have alternated with sudden reversals. After seeking to de-link from Russia in the first decade after independence—while retaining membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)—Uzbekistan leveraged its position on Afghanistan's doorstep to take an active role in the US-led war on terror. Not only did Tashkent allow Washington to

use its base at Qarshi-Khanabad in 2001, it also engaged in active intelligence collection and sharing. Only a few years later, in 2005, growing Western pressure on issues of human right abuses and the lack of political and economic reform convinced the leadership in Tashkent that vulnerability to Western pressure risked jeopardizing regime security. That fall, a few weeks after Tashkent evicted US troops from its base, Uzbekistan and Russia signed a new strategic partnership agreement.<sup>11</sup> Ties with Russia intensified and with the West cooled down for a few years, but in 2008–2009 Tashkent was ready for a change of direction.<sup>12</sup> Karimov agreed to allow the transit of non-lethal supplies to (and later from) Afghanistan on the Northern Distribution Network, while opposing any Russian attempt to increase the military component of the CSTO through the establishment of a rapid reaction force, ultimately suspending its participation (but not the membership) in the organization. Before his death, President Karimov's opposition to the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union grew more vocal. Amid all this, the relationship between Uzbekistan and China, an increasingly important economic partner of the Central Asian republics, also intensified, while security cooperation within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) remained limited due to Tashkent's reluctance to participate in military exercises and peace-keeping operations. Overall, however, a consensus has emerged that regardless of the specific partner, Karimov's top priority has always been non-alignment, whether described as "self-reliance,"<sup>13</sup> a "multi-vector foreign policy,"<sup>14</sup> or "omni-balancing."<sup>15</sup> Whatever the exact terminology, Karimov was keen that Uzbekistan's security – including that of his own regime – would not become vulnerable to external pressure. Or, as he aptly put it himself: "The Uzbek people will never be dependent on anyone."<sup>16</sup>

Uzbekistan's 2012 Foreign Policy Concept restates this point through the formulation of "four no's": no to foreign bases on Uzbek territory; no to participation in military blocs; no to involvement in peace-keeping operations abroad; and no to mediation by any external

power of any conflict in Central Asia.<sup>17</sup> These four no's are just another way of articulating Tashkent's well-known foreign policy stance, hostile to the deployment of any foreign troops on its territory (post-US eviction in 2005) or close to it, which explains Uzbekistan's hostility to any attempt to change the charter of the CSTO and launch a rapid reaction force (possibly accompanied by the opening of a Russian base in southern Kyrgyzstan, next to the Uzbek border) which would intervene in local conflicts.

### <B>The Role of Identity

The third debate, central to the analysis below and quite possibly to the future course of Uzbekistan's international conduct, examines the link between identity and foreign policy. In the first decade after independence, scholars focused more on the possibility that contested borders, territorial oddities like the enclaves in the Fergana Valley,<sup>18</sup> and cross-border minority groups might trigger the intervention of their respective patron states, leading to domino effects of territorial claims and possible separatist and irredentist claims.<sup>19</sup> Karimov was acutely aware of this himself. In his 1997 book, Karimov outlined his vision of security: "The support for indivisibility of security as a permanent process with no limits, the threat posed by ethnic, regional, and local conflicts and aggressive separatism, the lack of a collective security system in Uzbekistan's proximate environment, terrorism, drug-trafficking, arms trade, and ecological problems."<sup>20</sup> A separate mention is reserved for a particular kind of threat: Uzbekistan's "encirclement by countries burdened with ethnic, demographic, economic, and other problems."<sup>21</sup> Uzbekistan's geopolitical environment is elevated to the level of a problem, and Uzbekistan is the only bulwark against chaos. What seemed to worsen the situation is the fact that "these [Afghanistan, Tajikistan] where the Uzbek diaspora are the most numerous among foreign ones (sic)."<sup>22</sup> Later in the volume, Karimov outlined a way out of the quagmire: the inviolability of borders,<sup>23</sup> the importance of a country's multi-ethnic character to its stability and security,<sup>24</sup> and the significance assigned

to the links with Uzbek communities living outside Uzbekistan: “The unity of any nation, the Uzbek nation included, implies close linkages with its ethnic brothers, living in other sovereign states, including the Central Asian countries.”<sup>25</sup> The question of cross-border minorities (or “separated nations”) is primarily discussed as a source of threat:

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The ongoing conflicts give some people a possibility to exaggerate the problems of “separated nations.” Often a deliberate selection of arguments in favor of, for example, the unification of Tadjiks or Uzbeks and Pushtun tribes on both sides of the border with Afghanistan. It is terrible to imagine the consequences of any attempt to change the existing borders using the ethnic principles of division.

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Uzbekistan’s attitude toward Uzbeks abroad illustrates this point well. Uzbekistan’s leadership has made respect for state sovereignty a key dimension of its domestic and foreign policy. Uzbekistan’s attitude toward cross-border Uzbek co-ethnics has defied predictions dating back to the early post-independence period that Tashkent would engage in irredentist policies, or at the very least would act as the patron of Uzbeks abroad.<sup>26</sup> Contacts with Uzbeks abroad have been limited, and officialdom has traditionally refrained from commenting on the conditions of the co-ethnics in the neighboring republics, preferring underground operations and contacts. Not only has Tashkent not intervened, but it has also looked at Uzbek co-ethnics with caution and even suspicion. Uzbeks abroad are not seen as Uzbekistan’s “own Uzbeks,” and thus are not of Tashkent’s concern.

Uzbekistan’s leadership has not contemplated irredentism, instead remaining focused on domestic state-building. Tashkent has sought to insulate the country and the population from the rest of the region, construed as a constant source of problems and threats, fellow ethnic kin included. In this respect, Uzbekistan’s attitude radically differs from that of Kazakhstan<sup>27</sup> or the Russian Federation<sup>28</sup> The rationale behind the adoption of such policies diaspora policies is different in the two states. Kazakhstan’s interest in the diaspora was primarily aimed at re-establishing demographic superiority in the country, whereas the

Russian diaspora has mainly been used as a rhetorical tool in the domestic political debate in the 1990s and only in the 2000s – as in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz cases – support for Russian citizens abroad was used as a rationale to intervene beyond its borders. With security concerns paramount and the elaboration of a public discourse that construes Uzbekistan as a “fortress” encircled by threats to the integrity and stability of the state, Tashkent has emphasized the consolidation of the state rather than the strengthening of ties with co-ethnics as the country’s paramount policy concern.

Taken together, all three debates (what drives Uzbek foreign policy; the sudden shifts; and the link between identity and foreign policy) are relevant to the case discussed next, namely Uzbekistan’s response to the clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in and around the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. What emerges from a study of two-and-a-half decades of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy is the paramount role of domestic issues, such as preserving the country’s sovereignty and independence and regime concerns, from security to survival. To ensure those goals, specific foreign policy stances were adopted. These included severing links with Uzbek co-ethnics, out of concern for domino effects, as well as a strong stance on non-alignment in international affairs. This translated into reluctance to take part in regional organizations, a preference for bilateralism over multilateralism, and for dealing with state actors over non-state ones; the apparent abandonment of Uzbek co-ethnics should be read in this light. How Karimov’s Uzbekistan reacted to the unfolding violence between groups of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in June 2010 well illustrates Tashkent’s firm adherence to these tenets.

#### <A>The 2010 Osh Events, Uzbekistan’s Response, and the Uzbek Blogosphere

This section examines Uzbekistan’s response to the June 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan. It uses those tragic events as a vantage point to illustrate the application of the broad tenets and principles of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy over the past twenty-five years. The events served

as a “stress test” of one of the cornerstones of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy. The discussion will show strong elements of continuity in the government’s unwavering focus on stability, the status quo, and non-interference. As Uzbekistan’s own media are censored, and open criticism of the authorities will be met with an immediate crackdown, it is not easy to gauge popular reactions to official policy in the Uzbek context. To do so, I rely on an analysis of Uzbek-language blogs, discussion boards, and forums.

Here I am specifically interested in “Uzbek perspectives” and thus I leave perspectives from Kyrgyz or others aside. While most of the analysis focuses on the period during the violence and immediately after it, I also followed up on some of the blogs and assessed retrospective reactions about the 2010 events to find out how these incidents were framed.<sup>29</sup>

After escalating in May, inter-ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan erupted in June 2010. Clashes between groups of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz sparked in the city of Osh and its immediate surroundings in southern Kyrgyzstan during the night of June 10. As Kyrgyzstan’s authorities struggled to regain control, violence continued until June 14, costing the lives of several hundred Kyrgyzstani citizens—Uzbek and Kyrgyz alike. This section briefly revisits the events, before turning to Uzbekistan’s official response.<sup>30</sup>

In the spring of 2010, after the fall of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev’s regime in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan was slow and reluctant to engage the new Kyrgyz leadership. Despite explicitly pointing to the domestic nature of the April 2010 events, Uzbekistan was—as it had been with President Askar Akayev’s downfall five years before—alarmed by how easily regimes collapsed “next door.” Following the latest “revolution” in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan kept its border with its neighbor tightly sealed.

On June 12 Uzbekistan agreed to take refugees in, following increasing domestic and international pressure and facing a situation where thousands of people were desperately



trying to leave Kyrgyzstan. The border stayed open until June 14, when the Uzbek authorities decided to close it again. Officially set at 45,000, the actual number of refugees turned out to be much higher, possibly reaching 75,000. Initially, families fleeing the violence were welcomed in private homes in Andijan province. This move was soon reversed by the authorities and refugees (only women and children were allowed into the country) were placed in camps. The Uzbek authorities restricted their movements in an attempt to prevent individuals from leaving the camps and possibly become untraceable.

By then two things had happened. Russia's support for Bishkek dwindled, possibly because of the interim authorities' decision to continue the agreement with the United States over the use of the Manas airbase. Crucially, it became clear that the new government had lost control of the situation in the south. Then interim leader Roza Otunbayeva asked Russia to intervene.<sup>31</sup> Moscow's initial response revealed hesitation, suggesting that while direct Russian intervention was not possible, action under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was a possibility. In the end, Russia, and by extension the CSTO, rejected Kyrgyzstan's call for help.<sup>32</sup>

#### <B>Uzbekistan's Official Response

Uzbekistan's reaction toward the violence ravaging southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 was consistent with its broader attitude toward its neighbors and Uzbek co-ethnics in the region.<sup>33</sup> While condemning the clashes,<sup>34</sup> Tashkent emphasized that these constituted Kyrgyzstan's domestic affairs and did not reflect the historical spirit of harmonious co-existence in Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations.<sup>35</sup> The crisis unfolded while a Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit meeting was taking place in Tashkent. On that occasion, President Karimov pointed out that Uzbekistan's position on events in Kyrgyzstan was "clearly reflected in the statement of the Uzbek Foreign Ministry made on April 9, 2010." Emphasizing that this was "an internal affair of Kyrgyzstan," Karimov laconically concluded, "that says everything." Apart from

President Karimov's brief remarks, the only official statement was delivered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on June 12.<sup>36</sup> The statement conveyed two main messages. First was the condemnation of "unpunished killings, violence, pogroms," noting that these were primarily perpetrated against members of the Uzbek community. Second was the interpretation of the events. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that, rather than being a spontaneous outbreak of interethnic violence, the actions have "an organized, manipulated and provocative nature," with the aim to instigate (rather than being driven by) inter-ethnic animosities. The statement emphasized the long tradition of friendly relations between the many ethnic communities living in Kyrgyzstan. Later that year at a United Nations meeting in New York, President Karimov returned to the issue of the Osh events and reiterated the interpretation conveyed by the Foreign Ministry in June that the events had been orchestrated by unspecified "third forces" (*uchinki ko'chlar*):

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Today we have every reason to claim that the Kyrgyz themselves and the numerous Uzbeks living in the south of that country, fell hostage to a deeply thought-out and well-organized action on the part of third forces. The action was aimed not only at instigating chaos and unruly situation in the country, but also pursued far reaching goals of drawing Uzbekistan into this brutal massacre and in the end turn the interethnic standoff into an interstate confrontation of the two neighboring nations, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>37</sup>

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Attending a Collective Security Treaty Organization summit in Moscow in December that year Karimov's remarks stroke a similar tone:

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I am convinced that had we not maintained the situation under control at that critical period of time, the inter-ethnic confrontation in southern Kyrgyzstan could have turned into an interstate conflict between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. [...] Uzbekistan does not intend to take part in peacekeeping operations outside its territory.<sup>38</sup>

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This short review of Uzbekistan's official response to the crisis reveals that President Karimov's reading of the events was informed by two key considerations. First, although

unspecified further, ascribing responsibility to “third forces” shifted the framing of the events from ethnic to externally-induced, with the possible aimed of getting Uzbekistan involved. The Osh events are construed as Kyrgyzstan’s own domestic affairs and as such, consistent with the policy positions laid out earlier (and later conceptualized in the 2010 Foreign Policy Concept) of non-intervention. Uzbekistan’s refusal to intervene, the argument goes, prevented inter-communal violence from escalating into inter-state war. Although much of Karimov’s positioning was geared toward demonstrating Uzbekistan’s wise posture in regional policy, his position during the Osh events was heavily criticized online.

#### <B>Beyond Officialdom: The Uzbek Blogosphere<sup>39</sup>

An analysis of the discussions held in the Uzbek blogosphere during and in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 events reveals a high degree of heterogeneity of views concerning the Osh violence and specifically Uzbekistan’s response. A clear tilt toward the Uzbek regime was readily recognizable. The majority of blogs were clearly oppositional, and, from what was possible to evince, the bloggers appeared to live outside of Uzbekistan and, in most cases, also outside of Central Asia.

An initial distinction can be made between those that blamed the inability of Kyrgyzstan’s interim authorities for stopping the violence and those that instead focused on official Uzbekistan. This was clearly evident in the Kundalik and Uzbek Wounds fora:

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Who can guarantee that such things [bloodshed] won't be repeated in the future again? Rosa Otunboyeva? This woman who proclaims a true democracy might not be able to install democracy in Kyrgyzstan but rather bring about anarchy.<sup>40</sup>

The interim government of Kyrgyzstan took no precautions to prevent the killing.<sup>41</sup>

Why was the government of Uzbekistan not invited by the temporary government of Kyrgyzstan to help arrange peace and to find a way of punishing the guilty ones?<sup>42</sup>

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Others, such as O'zbek Olami, saw a Russian plot behind the events:

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Islam Karimov claimed that the conflict in Kyrgyzstan between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks was caused by third forces. Indeed, it cannot be denied that third forces played a crucial role here: The economic embargo which started on 7–8 April and was imposed by Uzbekistan and also partly by Kazakhstan is one reason for the outbreak of the socio-political conflict. Naturally, Islam Karimov, Nursulton Nazarbayev and Vladimir Putin use any means to prevent liberalism and democracy in their countries.<sup>43</sup>

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Contributors to the Ponauz blog took a similar line:

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These mass killings and ethnic genocide are orchestrated by Russian special services and current Interim government of Kyrgyzstan. Russia who has lost its influence in Central Asia has been trying to make plans to restore political and military influence.<sup>44</sup>

Many active Uzbekistan security services personnel and co-worker officers from the Fergana Valley, who are outraged with mass killings of Uzbeks are sending me numerous messages to my old electronic address and are pleading to tell international community the truth. According to them, Uzbekistan president has ordered to gather security forces in the Fergana Valley, but not to intervene into Kyrgyzstan events. Many officers from Valley and soldiers in Uzbek army, Internal Affairs Ministry and National Security Agency disagree with this order.<sup>45</sup>

Russia is keen to escalate the situation in southern Kyrgyzstan and to spread it around Fergana Valley.<sup>46</sup>

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Turning now to Uzbekistan, there are multiple grounds for criticism of that country's leadership. Many contributors complained that Uzbekistan opened its borders too late, while President Karimov was allegedly enjoying a lavish banquet with other members of the SCO:

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Yet, [instead of planning a revenge, as assumed by some people] Karimov did not react to the bad news about the bloodshed on the 10th of June which probably reached him secretly during the SCO summit but rather listen with interest to concerts, had a

banquette until late with his colleagues, had joyful toasts with them and visited other spectacles):<sup>47</sup>  
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Others noted that Karimov could have done more to prevent the conflict, although the impression one gets from the online discussion is that support for a direct military intervention was scarce to non-existent.

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These [referring to his speech in Bukhoro after the events] are the thoughts Islam Karimov shared one week after the events [in Kyrgyzstan] took their course. Yet, he does not talk about how such incidents can be prevented in the future and what kind of practical measures could be taken. Thus, in the end the events benefit his dictatorship and his ideological movement [such as the discourses on conspiracy theories] is strengthened once again.<sup>48</sup>  
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However, a more assertive diplomatic role was expected.

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Why was the government of Uzbekistan not invited by the temporary government of Kyrgyzstan for helping to arrange peace and to find a way of punishing the guilty ones? The army should not be sent there, yet, is there no other practical help which can be given?<sup>49</sup>  
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They also saw no indication that the intellectuals in both countries had gotten involved and tried to mitigate the conflict:

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Why wasn't it possible that the Uzbek and Kyrgyz intellectuals come together and go to Osh and Jalalabad for organizing a meeting with the people?<sup>50</sup>  
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Others contributors pointed to the role of Uzbekistan's security forces in various respects. One contributor on Ponauz claimed to know that many officers of the Uzbek security forces disagreed with Karimov's order not to interfere, although no evidence is

provided to support the claim. Another blogger (O'zbeklar olami) assumes that “third forces” were indeed involved. However, instead of supporting Karimov’s claim, (s)he alleged that Uzbekistan was part of such forces. Karimov is then blamed for taking advantage of the situation and making his dictatorship internationally look good and further strengthen it. The metaphor of President Karimov “playing once again the Osh card again (O’sh kartasi)” is used. Furthermore, there is a general impression that Karimov’s decision to take in refugees initially was driven by a desire to appear in control and also to acquire information about the refugees themselves, which Tashkent’s security forces suspected included some oppositional figures. In Turonzamin, one contributor noted that:

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This [the fact, that Uzbekistan already started his own investigations] could be interpreted as a positive gesture of Toshkent. Yet, one could also say that the interrogation of the refugees is kept under control in order to detect those people among the refugees which are in opposition to the government in Toshkent and prevent that something inadvertently is brought to light.<sup>51</sup>

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In his listing of the possible factors behind the Osh events the blogger on “Jahonnoma2” points to the role of outside forces, including Uzbekistan.<sup>52</sup>

Lastly, among the many critical voices, however, one could also find some expressions of support for Uzbekistan’s leadership (on Dabronbek’s blog and on Uforum.uz):

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The Uzbek government helps them [Osh Uzbeks] and takes care of their needs.<sup>53</sup>

The Uzbek people and the Uzbek government offer to our countrymen [from Kyrgyzstan] all the help they can.<sup>54</sup>

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To summarize, as the tragic events of June 2010 unfolded, Uzbekistan acted consistently with its prior positions on questions of territoriality, sovereignty, and citizenship.<sup>55</sup> It has re-affirmed that whatever takes place within the territory of a neighboring

country falls within the remit of that state's domestic affairs. The ethnic links between Uzbeks on either side of the border were not activated and, in the end, Uzbekistan's refusal to intervene on Kyrgyzstan's territory helped mitigate the conflict.<sup>56</sup> Such caution has been accompanied by an uneasy balance between concern over a possibly uncontrolled flow of refugees who would then disperse across the country, and pressure from both international and local humanitarian organizations to provide a more pro-active form of humanitarian relief. Thus a debate on how to best deal with the crisis has emerged, revealing how Uzbekistan's official stance may not meet everyone's expectations. I am aware that the sample of the online discussion fora and blogs reviewed above is not representative and that in most cases it is impossible to gauge whether the discussion involved Uzbeks based in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, or third countries. At the same time, what clearly emerges is an impression that Uzbeks do not speak with one voice and intra-group variation is considerable.<sup>57</sup> A review of Uzbek-language blogs and discussion fora in June 2010 (and monitored in subsequent years) shows that Uzbekistan's leadership came under intense criticism for not intervening on behalf of Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks.

#### <A>In Lieu of a Conclusion: Whither Uzbekistan after Karimov?

Although much discussion will cluster around domestic policy issues, elite politics, and state-society relations, the death of President Karimov raises a number of questions about Uzbekistan's foreign policy and, more broadly, Central Asian security. Two issues merit close monitoring. Uzbekistan's response to the Osh events was a clear demonstration of Tashkent's worldview and how the country would, and should, behave in international affairs. The first concerns non-alignment, specifically the reluctance to tie itself too closely to any external player or even to participate actively to any regional organization. Tashkent's refusal to intervene militarily or even to support the role of any regional organization (SCO

or CSTO) or that of a specific country (Russia) to stop the violence and mediate between the parties in 2010 was clearly restated in the 2012 Foreign Policy Concept. Karimov's position was adamant, and his opposition to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and even the alleged – from Tashkent's perspective – transformation of the CSTO into a military bloc was equally indisputable. Uzbekistan's international partners, including Russia (which will hope for a reversal of this position), China (a close commercial partner), and the United States will follow the moves of the new leadership closely. The second key area to watch again relates to the Osh response. Ethnicity has played a negligible role in shaping Uzbekistan's foreign policy to date. This might be Karimov's single largest contribution to Central Asian security.

Karimov was able to present himself as the “father of the nation,” the guardian of its sovereignty and independence. Specifically, he sought to create and project an image of strong statehood. Although Uzbekistan's nation-building strategy blurred the lines between ethnic and civic understandings of the nation,<sup>58</sup> Tashkent's foreign policy was driven by a statist approach to nationalism. The new leadership, as it consolidates power, could rely on the appeal of ethnic nationalism and possibly make it the basis of its foreign policy. I am not suggesting this is a likely course of action, and in fact, one has to note the overtures made by President Mirziyoyev to Uzbekistan's neighbours in his first months in office. If that were to occur, though, would be a dramatic reversal of over two decades of foreign policy, and likely to have dramatic consequences for regional stability. At the same time, support for Uzbek co-ethnics abroad, and even irredentism, a policy stance Karimov long abhorred for the fear of domino effects, might suddenly be implemented to boost domestic popular support, as the cases of Crimea and the Donbass demonstrated in 2014.

To boost legitimacy at home, the new leadership could opt to portray itself as the “head of all Uzbeks.” If so, Uzbekistan's traditional posture toward Uzbeks abroad might come under severe stress.



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<sup>1</sup> Islam A. Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi* (Tashkent: O'zbekiston, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew C. Kuchins, Jeffrey Mankoff, Aitolkyn Kourmanova, and Oliver Backes, *Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Uzbekistan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015); Matteo Fumagalli, "Alignments and Re-alignments in Central Asia: Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," *International Political Science Review* 28, no. 3 (2007): 253–271.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Horsman, "Uzbekistan's Involvement in the Tajik Civil War 1992–1997: Domestic Considerations," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (1999): 37–48; Leila Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy, 1991 to the Present," *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 205–216.

<sup>4</sup> Fumagalli, "Alignments and Re-alignments in Central Asia."

<sup>5</sup> Luca Anceschi, "Integrating Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Making: The Cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 143–158.

<sup>6</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy," *Central Asian Affairs* 1 (2014): 108–132.

<sup>7</sup> Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro, "Keeping Face in the Public Sphere: Recognition, Discretion and Uzbekistan's Relations with the United States and Germany, 1991–2006," *Central Asian Survey*, 34, no. 3 (2015): 341–356.

<sup>8</sup> Farkhod Tolipov, "Flexibility or Strategic Confusion? Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan." *Uzbekistan Initiative Papers* No. 2 (February 2014), George Washington University, Washington DC: Central Asia Program.

<sup>9</sup> Islam A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century: Threats to Security, Conditions of Stability, and Guarantees for Progress* (Tashkent: O'zbekiston, 1997), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, "Uzbekistan's Response to Violence in Kyrgyzstan between Caution, Concern, and Criticism," *Central Asia and the Caucasus Analyst* (June 24, 2010); Teles Fazendeiro, "Keeping Face in the Public Sphere."

<sup>11</sup> Fumagalli, "Alignments and Re-alignments in Central Asia."

<sup>12</sup> Tolipov, "Flexibility or Strategic Confusion?"

<sup>13</sup> Teles Fazeiro, “Keeping Face in the Public Sphere.”

<sup>14</sup> Pikalov, “Uzbekistan between the great powers.”

<sup>15</sup> Fumagalli, “Alignments and Re-alignments in Central Asia.”

<sup>16</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan. “Concept Paper on the Foreign Policy Activity of the Republic of Uzbekistan.” 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Arslan Koichiev, “Ethno-territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley during the Process of National Delimitation, 1924–7,” in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 45–56.

<sup>19</sup> Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy* (London: RIIA, 1998); Yaacov Ro'i, “Central Asian Riots and Disturbances 1989–1990: Causes and Context,” *Central Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (1991): 21–54; Martha Brill Olcott, “Nation-building and Ethnicity in the Foreign Policies of the New Central Asian States,” in *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Roman Szporluk (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 209–229; Martha Brill Olcott, “Ethnic Violence in Central Asia: Perceptions and Misperceptions,” in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, ed. Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Washington, DC: Eisenhower Institute, 1995); Donald S. Carlisle, “Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks,” *Problems of Communism* 40, no. 5 (September/October, 1991): 28–33; Donald S. Carlisle, “Geopolitics and Ethnic Problems of Uzbekistan and Its Neighbours,” in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i, (Newbury Park, Frank Cass, 1995), 71–103.

<sup>20</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 10–13.

<sup>21</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> Karimov, *O'zbek xalqi xech kachon xech kimga qaram bo'lmaydi*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Usbekische Zwickmühle. Staatsnationalismus und Auslandsuszbeken,” *Osteuropa*, no. 8/9 (2007): 237–244.

<sup>27</sup> Sally N. Cummings, “The Kazakhs: Demographics, Diasporas, and ‘Return’,” in *Nations Abroad: Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Charles King and Neil J. Melvin (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 133–152.

<sup>28</sup> Neil J. Melvin, *Russians beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity* (London, RIIA, 1995.)

<sup>29</sup> Only blogs and sources written in Uzbek were considered here. Blogs and discussion groups accessed comprise the following: Davro'nbek's blog (<http://davronbek.ziyouz.com/?p=452>), Ponauz (<https://ponauz.wordpress.com>), Jahonnoma (<http://jahonnoma.com/2010/06/>), Turonzamin (<http://turonzamin.org/2010/07/>), Yodgor Turlibekov (<http://turonzamin.org/2010/06/25/farzin/>), Kundalik (<https://kundalik.wordpress.com/tag/osh/>), Uzbek Tragedy (<http://uzbektragedy.com/uz/>), IslomDini (<https://islomdini.wordpress.com/page/6/>). While the list is by no means exhaustive, an analysis of the opinions expressed on those sites is none the less sufficiently varied to capture both the heterogeneity of Uzbek views and voices and highlight the main clusters of opinions. The search was carried out for relevant key words in Uzbek (e.g. “o'zbeklar qirg'iziston janubida 2010,” “o'sh millatlararo 2010 qonli,” etc. both in Cyrillic and Latin letters) were used.

Other websites consulted included Uforum.uz (available at <http://uforum.uz/archive/index.php/t-13153.html>), Forumuz.uz (<http://www.fromuz.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=18165&st=30>) and Forum Uzbekistan (<http://forumuzbekistan.forum2x2.ru/t92-topic>). As the interest was explicitly in the Uzbek-language blogosphere, common Uzbek oppositional online media such as “Amerika Ovozi,” “Ozodlik Radiosi,” and “Fergananevs” were omitted from data collection and analysis.

<sup>30</sup> This is discussed in greater length in Matteo Fumagalli, (2010b) 2010 “Islamic Radicalism and the Insecurity Dilemma in Central Asia: The Role of Russia,” in *Russia and Islam*, ed. Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (New York: Routledge, 2010), 191–208; Matteo Fumagalli, “Stateness, Contested Nationhood, and Imperiled Sovereignty: The Effects of Non-Western Leverage on Kyrgyzstan's Conflicts,” *East European Politics* 32, no. 3 (2016): 355–377; Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-led Protests in*

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*Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Morgan Liu, *Under Solomon's Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

31 S. Solovyov, "Roza Otunbaeva: Dast Bog, poluchim polozheitel'nyi otvet ot Rossii." *Kommersant*, June 18, 2010, accessed February 23, 2015, [www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=a2bb7dfe-3fb2-4f1f-b95d-54539e989d0b&docid=1387772](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=a2bb7dfe-3fb2-4f1f-b95d-54539e989d0b&docid=1387772).

32 Likewise, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was holding a summit in Tashkent at the time, refrained from intervening and in fact remained rather muted. See Shanghai Cooperation Organization, "Declaration of the Tenth Meeting of the Council of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization." June 11, 2010, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.sectso.org/EN123/show.asp?id=225>; Stephen Aris, "The Response of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to the Crisis in Kyrgyzstan." *Civil Wars* 14, no. 3 (2012): 451–476; Interfax, "CSTO Plans to Provide Kyrgyzstan with Non-lethal Law-enforcement Equipment," Interfax, June 15, 2010; "Over 75,000 Refugees from Kyrgyzstan Cross Uzbek Border," RIA Novosti, June 13, 2010.

33 Fumagalli, Matteo. "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and Uzbeks Abroad." *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 1 (2007a): 105–122.

34 "President Holds a Telephone Conversation with the UN Secretary-General," Jahon, June 17, 2010, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://www.jahonnews.uz/eng/sections/politics/president\\_holds\\_a\\_telephone\\_conversation\\_with\\_the\\_un\\_secretary\\_general\\_mgr](http://www.jahonnews.uz/eng/sections/politics/president_holds_a_telephone_conversation_with_the_un_secretary_general_mgr).

35 "Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan," Jahon, June 12, 2010, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://www.jahonnews.uz/eng/sections/politics/statement\\_by\\_the\\_ministry\\_of\\_foreign\\_affairs\\_of\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_uzbekistan\\_mgr](http://www.jahonnews.uz/eng/sections/politics/statement_by_the_ministry_of_foreign_affairs_of_the_republic_of_uzbekistan_mgr); "Concept Paper on the Foreign Policy Activity of the Republic of Uzbekistan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, 2012.

36 "Uzbekistan Foreign Ministry Expresses Concerns over Events in Kyrgyzstan," UzDaily, June 12, 2010.

37 "Qirg'izlarning o'zi ham, respublika janubida yashayotgan ko'p sonli o'zbeklar ham uchinchi kuchlar tomonidan puxta o'ylangan va uyushtirilgan aksiyaning qurboniga aylandi, deyish uchun bugun barcha asoslarimiz bor. Uzoqni ko'zlab amalga oshirilgan bu aksiyadan maqsad mamlakatda nafaqat tartibsizlik va parokandalikni yuzaga keltirish, balki O'zbekistonni ushbu vahshiyona xunrezlikka tortish, pirovard natijada, millatlararo qarama-qarshilikni ikki qo'shni mamlakat – Qirg'iziston hamda O'zbekiston o'rtasidagi davlatlararo qarama-qarshilikka aylantirishdan iborat edi," Press-Service.Uz, 2010.

38 "Agar ushbu qaltis paytda vaziyatni nazoratda saqlab turmaganimizda, Qirg'iziston janubidagi millatlararo qarama-qarshilik O'zbekiston va Qirg'iziston o'rtasidagi davlatlararo qarama-qarshilikka aylanib ketgan bo'lur edi." [...] 'O'zbekiston o'z hududidan tashqaridagi tinchlik o'rnatish operatsiyalarida ishtirok etmaydi," Press-Service.Uz, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Seraphine Maerz with the collection of data from Uzbek-language blogs and discussion fora.

40 "Kelajakda shu narsalarning yana takrorlanmasligiga kim kafolat bera oladi? Roza Otunboyevami? Haqiqiy demokratiya quramiz deb va'z qilayotgan bu xotin Qirg'izistonda demokratiya emas, boshboshdoqlik hukm surayotganini ko'rsatib qo'ydi-ku!" Kundalik, June 27, 2010; July 3, 2010.

41 "Qirg'iziston muvaqqat hukumati qatliomni to'xtatish uchun hech qanday chora ko'rmagani [...]," Kundalik forum June 14, 2011.

42 "Nega Uzbekiston khukumati Kirgiz Muvakkat khukumatiga Ush va Zhalolbodda tinchlikni urnatish, aibdirlarni topib zhalolash masalasida konkret erdamlar taklif etmaiati?" (Jahonnoma 15 June 2010).

43 "Islom Karimov Kirgizistondagi Kirgiz va uzbeklar urtasidagi mazhoroni uchinchi kuchlar keltirib chikardi deb iddao killi Lekin shu erda uchinchi kuchlarning rolini inkor kulmasdan, Uzbekiston tomonidan Kirgizistonga nisbatan iktisodii kamal 7–8 aprellan beri davom etaetganligi, Kozofiston tomondan esa kisman kamal davom etaetganligi izhtimoi siesii portlashga olib keluvchi kuchli omellardan biri ekanligini tan olishga mazhburmiz Albatta Islom Karimov, Nursulton Nazarboev, Vladimir Putin erkinlik va demokratiianing uz mamlakatlariga eiilishini oldini olish uchun barcha choralarni kurishadi," O'zbeklar olami, July 23, 2012.

44 Ponauz, June 15, 2010.

45 Ponauz, June 15, 2010.

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46 Ponauz, June 15, 2010.

47 “Ammo Karimov 10 iyun kungi kirinlaridan iakhshigina xhabardor ekanligini u iashirib ShOS sammitida uzini khech narsa bulmagandai tutishi marok bilan kontsertlarni, kasbdoshlari bilan, kechgi pir banketlarda guzal tostlar aytilib, fanfaralar iangragan tantanalarni tamosho kilar edi,” Blog, Yodgor Turlibekov, June 25, 2010.

48 “Bu Islom Karimovning voqealar boshlanishidan keyin oradan bir hafta o’tib bildirgan ilk ochiq fikridir. Lekin u bunday voqealar kelajakda ham kelib chiqmasligi yuzasidan qanday amaliy tadbirlar olish haqida lom-mim demadi. U endi bu voqealardan diktaturani yana ham mustahkamlash uchun ideologik harakatni ham boshlab berdi,” Turonzamin, June 19, 2010.

49 “Nega Uzbekiston khukumati Kirgiz Kuvakkat khukumatiga Ush va Zhalolobodda tinchlikni urnatish, aibdorlarni topib zhazolash masalasida konkret erdamlar taklif etmaia? Kushin kiritmasin, lekin amalii erdam berishi mumkin-ku?” (Jahonnoma 2, 15 June 2010).

50 “Nega uzbek zielilari Kirgiz zielilari bilan birgalikda Ush va Zhalolobodga borishlari va khalk bilan uchrashuvlar utkazishlari mumkin emas?” (Jahonnoma 1).

51 “Bu bir Karaganda bu Toshkentning izhobiy kadamidek bakholanishi mumkin. Pekin aslida bu surishtiruv kochkinlarni nazoratda tutib turish, ularning orasiga Toshkent khukumatiga karshi kuchlar aralashib— aralashmaganini aniklashdan va nimadir ochilib kolishidan chuchishdan iborat bulgan deiish mumkin,” Turonzamin, June 25, 2010.

52 “1. Khukumat uchun zhang; 2. Karimov rezhimining aralashuvi; 3. Tashki dune ta’siri; 4. Millii-tarikhii nizolar; 5. Dinii, izhtimoi, siesii va iktisodii muammolar iigindisi; 6. Mafiiia eki konundan tashkari kuchlarning kutkulari; 7. Kirgizlar orasidagi ichki nizolar; 8. Uzbeklar orasidagi ichki nizolar [juda oz ulush],” Jahonnoma2, July 12, 2010.

53 “Yordamga muhtojlarga O’zbekiston hukumati tomonidan sharoitlar yaratilmoqda,” Davronbek’s blog, June 17, 2010.

54 “O’zbek xalqi, hukumati o’z birodarlariga birodarlarcha yordam bermoqda,” Davronbek’s blog, June 17, 2010.

55 Matteo Fumagalli, “Usbekische Zwickmühle. Staatsnationalismus und Auslandsusbeken,” *Osteuropa*, no. 8/9 (2007): 237–244.

56 Fumagalli, “Stateness, Contested Nationhood, and Imperiled Sovereignty.”

57 This has also traditionally applied to the views of Uzbeks abroad towards Uzbekistan’s leadership See Fumagalli, “Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy” and “Usbekische Zwickmühle.”

58 Fumagalli, “Usbekische Zwickmühle.”